

2021

Annual Report



**Accessible Mental Health
Services - 7 Days a Week**

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Chairperson's Message



Gilles Varette, Chairperson

Dear friends and supporters,

A 2021 survey of the social impact of Covid-19 on well-being in Ireland found that almost six in ten respondents believed that the COVID-19 had impacted negatively on their mental health. This situation is exacerbated by a long waiting list for counselling support. While the picture of mental health and well-being in Ireland is still very bleak, I strongly believe that with the right mindset, right people and their dedication there is light at the end of the tunnel.

Nowadays there is growing recognition that mental health is about wellness rather than illness, that it is thoughts and emotions that define our mental health, that there are steps we can take to improve our emotional health: "mental Health ... is not a destination, but a process. It's about how you drive not where you are going" (Noam Shpancer).

While some organisations in our society are taking the necessary steps to support employees, students, and those in their care, others prey on the less fortunate and the younger generation. A 2020 paper from the College of Psychiatrists of Ireland highlights that children have been shown to be particularly vulnerable to gambling advertising, and International research demonstrates that about three quarters of teenagers aged between 12 and 17 gambles

annually, higher than any other age group: we are delighted that our addiction services are being recognised as making an impact.

The support we received across Ireland for Coldtober, our first annual event, was outstanding, and I want to sincerely thank all the participants and donors, the money raised goes a long way towards providing much needed mental-health support and services.

Helplink is growing year on year, and we continue to improve: To quote from Carol Dweck "challenges are exciting rather than threatening. So rather than thinking, oh, I'm going to reveal my weaknesses, you say, wow, here's a chance to grow".

Helplink's CEO, Staff and counsellors continue to do an amazing job; I want to thank our board of trustees, long standing and newer members alike. After many years service, both Clíodhna and Tammie have resigned from the Board of Trustees; we are grateful for their support and contribution. Tammie in particular has been a pillar of the organisation providing sound advice to the board, and clinical supervision to our counsellors since its beginning in 2012. We also welcomed new trustees: our HR specialist Ruairí Keyes, Evin Cusack, and also Michelle Murphy who will be taking over Tammie's role and responsibilities.

COVID-19

As we are all aware COVID-19 had a serious effect not only on the physical health of the population but it also had a very significant effect on the populations' mental health (ref: <https://publichealth.ie/blog-impact-of-covid-19-on-the-mental-health-of-people-living-on-the-island-of-ireland/>).

Helplink's express intention was to be at the forefront nationally, when it came to supporting people with their mental health during this time. For example, despite not having any government funding or support Helplink provided the first and only national counselling service for people who had lost their employment during the pandemic. This service ran from March 2020 right through to August of 2021; it was provided for free.

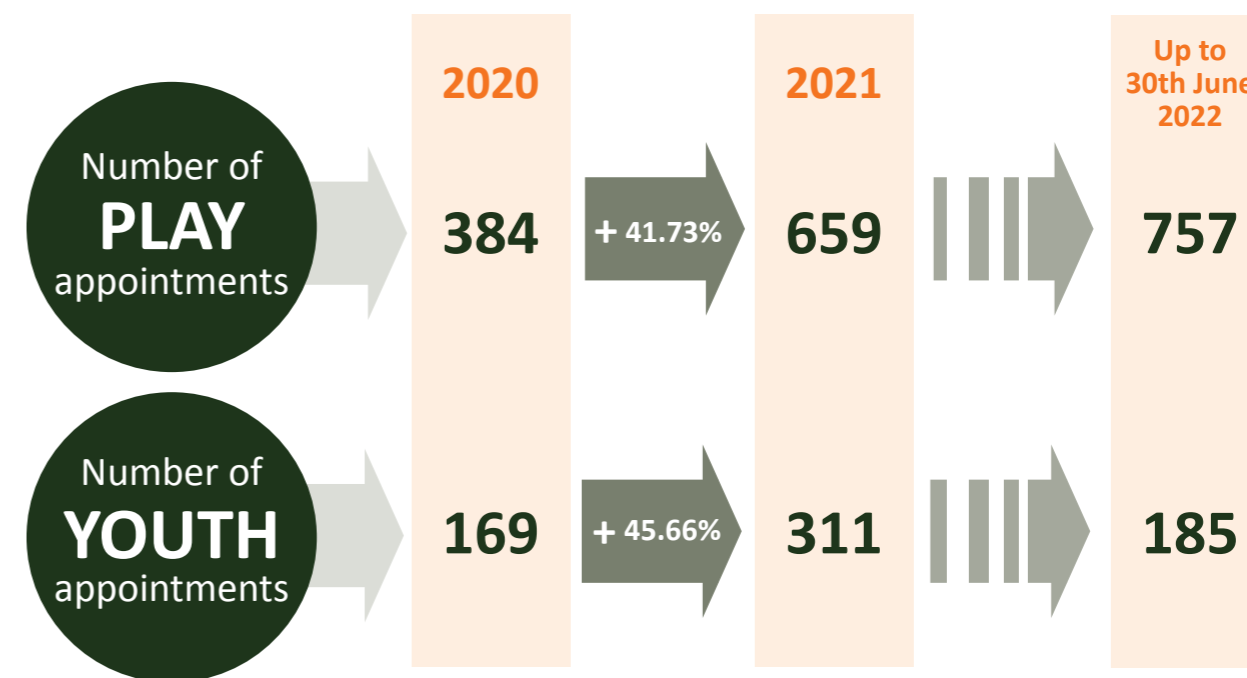
Furthermore, we developed and released (with funding support by the Irish Youth Foundation) our 6th class workshop The Voyage nationally on our new e-learning

platform Mind Hacks.ie. Up until that point we had been providing the workshop in person in schools in Dublin and Galway; however we saw the immediate need to support these children on a national basis, especially during the pandemic due to the severe upheaval of children's normal school lives.

Child and youth mental health was (and still is!) particularly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic which can be seen in national trends of children and young people seeking and needing more support for the mental health and wellbeing (ref: <https://www.tcd.ie/tricc/research/COVID-19.php>). We, in Helplink have also seen this trend in support seeking behaviour as can be seen from the below graphic; that illustrates the rates of increases in these populations seeking counselling support from Helplink.

Gilles Varette

Chairperson of Helplink Mental Health



CEO's Message



Lochlann Scott, CEO

2021 was another tough year for us all both mentally and physically in Ireland and beyond. However, we as a nation pulled together once again to support our most vulnerable in our communities and everyone who was affected by the pandemic. Helplink along with many other NGOs were/are still at the forefront of providing care and support to our citizens no matter where they were in the world.

In 2021 we provided >6,100 counselling appointments to children, young people and adults locally, nationally and internationally.

Furthermore, we provided our unique (no teacher training needed) continuously accessible Student Mental Health Workshops to >3000 primary school children across the country through our e-learning platform Mind Hacks. Also on the Mind Hacks platform we supported >1100 people to find mental health information through our unique digital video and podcast libraries; some of the most viewed videos and listened to podcasts were around sleep issues and also child and youth anxiety.

We continued our partnerships with the Gambling Awareness Trust (providing Ireland's only national gambling addiction counselling service), TUSLA and many others during 2021 and we enhanced our partnership with Rethink Ireland. In 2020 we were delighted to be participants in the GENEISIS programme with Rethink Ireland and in 2021 we were again successful in a competitive application process with Rethink Ireland as we were one of 16 organisations' nationally to be accepted

on the Social Enterprise Development Fund!

I, on behalf of Helplink, would like to thank all of our counselling clients, workshop participants and mental health information seekers for choosing to work with us to benefit their mental health and wellbeing and we look forward to continuing to support you all now and throughout your lifetimes.

Furthermore, I would like to thank our funding partners, the companies that have taken on our Employee Assistance Programmes for their staff, the schools we work with, local councils in Galway and Mayo, our partners on the Irish Abroad counselling service, our technology partners and the 490 brave Coldtober(ians) participants who braved the cold sea or shower for 31 days in October to raise vital funds for our mental health services; and of course everyone else who works with us to provide the best in class mental health services possible for our communities.

Finally, I would like to thank Helplink's Board of Trustees for their time and dedication to Helplink's mission and vision, our administration staff, our counsellors/therapists and of course our volunteers; without your support Helplink would not be making the amazing impact it makes daily, weekly, monthly and yearly with regard to mental health service provision.

Mise le meas,

Lochlann Scott

Founder/CEO @ Helplink Mental Health



Our Mission

Helplink Mental Health's mission is to provide accessible, free or low cost mental health services; locally, nationally and internationally, 7 days a week and out-of-hours.

The three types of mental health services that Helplink provides are: Counselling, Information Provision and Education.

Our Vision

To be a leading charitable organisation by providing innovative and accessible mental health services locally, nationally and internationally.

Our Values

We value **Innovation** in service delivery and we work on an ongoing basis with our funding partners and clients to ensure that we are providing the best service possible; in a way that meets our clients' needs. Innovation in technology is one of these examples as we provide most of our services online, as well as face-to-face, which enables people in rural areas, people with physical disabilities and others to receive the support they need in a way that suits them.

We as an organisation value **Partnership** with other agencies/organisations in local, national and international communities. It is our belief that non-profit organisations can accomplish more if we work to complement the existing resources available in these communities rather than duplicate them. An example of our partnerships on a local level is providing appointments in local health centres and community centres in order to bring our much needed services to the people where they need them. Our work with Irish support organisations on the ground internationally to promote our Irish Abroad Counselling Service and to help facilitate client referrals; is an

example of our work with international partners.

As a charitable organisation, that provides mental health services, **Transparency** is of paramount importance to us. Helplink operates in a way that is honest, transparent and ethical. Our accounts are available to the public for viewing, upon request, as are our annual reports.

Confidentiality is a key value for our organisation due to the work we carry out in the mental health sector. We go above and beyond the industry standards when it comes to confidentiality – we achieve this, for example, by not storing client counselling notes in the cloud and by not keeping any paper based files for clients. We also have client contracts where confidentiality is discussed with the client for transparency. Furthermore, all staff, volunteers, board members, contractors sign up to our code of conduct which is available in our HR policies and procedure document.

Helplink believes in the philosophy of **Good Stewardship**. As a result we endeavour to have a Board that has a diverse range of skills, expertise, genders and personal qualities in order to provide robust and effective stewardship. We are a registered charity with the Charities Regulatory Authority (CRA) (Ireland) and also have (CHY) status with the Revenue Commissioners.

Furthermore, we have systems and processes that are regularly reviewed, to ensure that we can achieve and sustain our objectives with integrity.

Our Mental Health Services

Local & International Counselling Services

ONLINE COUNSELLING 7 DAYS & OUT-OF-HOURS	IN-PERSON COUNSELLING 7 DAYS & OUT-OF-HOURS (Galway & Mayo)	INFORMATION & EDUCATION 7 DAYS & 24/7
GENERAL COUNSELLING	GENERAL COUNSELLING	VIDEO LIBRARY <i>'Some say the "Netflix" of Mental Health Content'</i>
YOUTH COUNSELLING	YOUTH COUNSELLING	PODCAST LIBRARY <i>'Some say the "Spotify" of Mental Health Content'</i>
ADDICTION COUNSELLING	ADDICTION COUNSELLING	STUDENT/STAFF WELLBEING WORKSHOPS/WEBINARS <i>'Mental Health Life Skills Training for Students & Employees/Staff'</i>
COUPLES / RELATIONSHIP COUNSELLING	COUPLES COUNSELLING	
BEREAVEMENT / GRIEF COUNSELLING	BEREAVEMENT COUNSELLING	
GAMBLING ADDICTION COUNSELLING	PLAY THERAPY	
IRISH ABROAD COUNSELLING	ART THERAPY	

Mental Health Counselling Services (National, Local & International)

Helplink's qualified, insured and Garda vetted counsellors are available for appointments 7 days a week and out-of-hours from 9 am to 9 pm Monday to Friday and 12 to 6 pm Saturday and Sunday; for free or at low set costs.

Since its inception in 2012, our Counsellors and Therapists have provided appointments to children, young people and adults, online nationally and also face-to-face in Galway and Mayo.

Galway & Mayo: locally we provide the above suite of counselling services and also Play or Art Therapy; face-to-face.

Tusla Commissioned Services: Since 2017 we have been providing a free alcohol dependency counselling service to clients over 18 referred to Helplink by Tusla. In 2021 Helplink was commissioned by Tusla to provide a second service, where we provide counselling to Tusla foster carers in need of support (general, bereavement, addiction and/or couples counselling).

Irish Abroad & Returning Irish Counselling Service: we also have an international service where we provide our unique free, online Irish Abroad counselling service for Irish citizens living abroad and also returning Irish emigrants.

Sample Testimonial from an Irish Abroad service client: April 2021

"The support I received from your Irish Abroad service has been greatly appreciated, much valued and had it not been freely available to me through your service I would not have been in a position to be supported otherwise. For this I am sending my deep thanks to the team, funders and those who donate their funds and time to this service. This is an invaluable service and particularly important for individuals like me who are abroad. To benefit from support from a professional who has a context of Irish culture, society, beliefs can give focused and nuanced support that would not otherwise be available."

National Counselling Services

- **General Counselling**
- **Couples Counselling**
- **Youth Counselling** (including addiction)
- **Addiction Counselling**
- **Bereavement Therapy**
- **Student Mentoring/Counselling Services**
- **Employee Counselling Service:** we provide a national staff/employee counselling service that is available 7 days a week; nationwide. This is a pay-as-you-go service; which is perfect for companies small, medium and large.
- **Gambling Addiction Counselling Service:** Helplink provides Ireland's only free, national gambling addiction counselling service, by phone and online (video); 7 days a week..

Information Provision & Educational Services



Mind Hacks (mindhacks.ie) is an e-learning platform by Helplink, which provides mental health and emotional wellbeing information and education services:

- Video and Podcast Libraries around the topics of mental health & emotional wellbeing. Free to use, content for all ages; available 24/7. The Netflix and Spotify of mental health content!
- Educational mental wellness and resilience building Workshops for students (primary/secondary/third level) that are available 24/7.



Mental Health Services Expansion

During 2021 Helplink service provision continued to grow and expand. Physically we moved our second office in Kiltimagh County Mayo to Castlebar in 2021 to provide even more opportunities for in-person support, and at the same time, we increased our online (national and international) presence.

We achieved greater online mental health information and education service provision impact through working with our funding partners during the period e.g. the Irish Youth Foundation and our technical partners NUI Galway.

During 2021 our e-learning platform *MindHacks.ie* went from strength to strength supporting 1000s of people seeking mental health information and education services that are available accessibly 24/7.



Mind Hacks provides Ireland's first digital podcast and video libraries with regard to mental health; this free to use service supports the public (all ages) by providing information about mental health in way that people are more likely to engage with i.e. video and podcasts instead of the written word.

Furthermore, we fully launched (2020 was a pilot year) one of our student mental health workshops (that previously was only available in person in Galway and Dublin) to be available online nationally.

The Voyage is a workshop, designed by Helplink Play and Art Therapists, which supports children's emotional wellbeing during their transition from 6th class in primary school into secondary (post-primary) school.

This support is achieved by providing the children with age appropriate mental health life-skills that they can practice and re-practice from home for 10 months after the course has taken place in school.

Sample testimonial for The Voyage from a teacher:

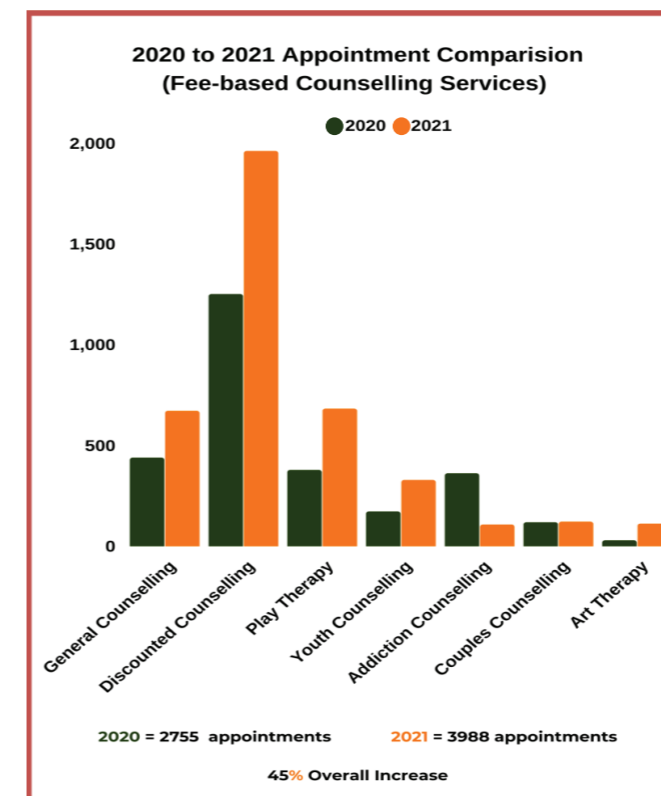
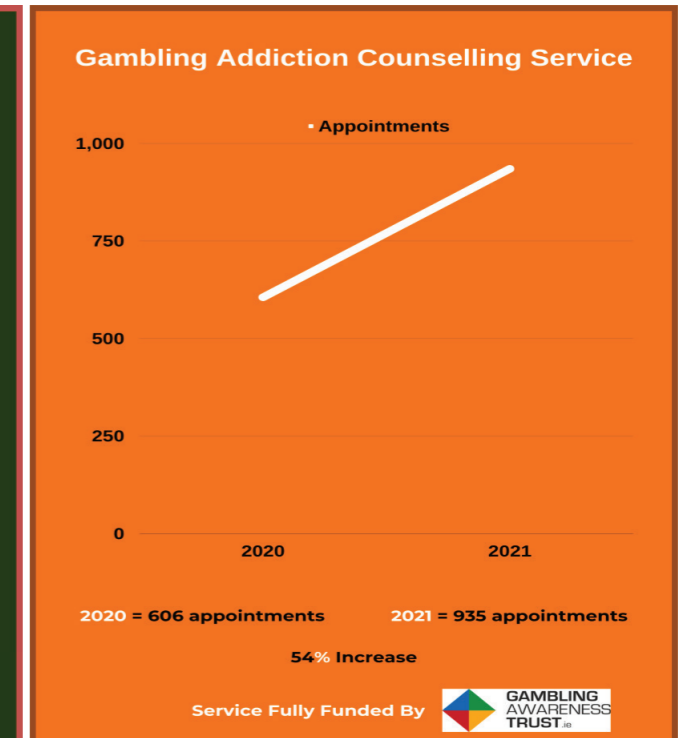
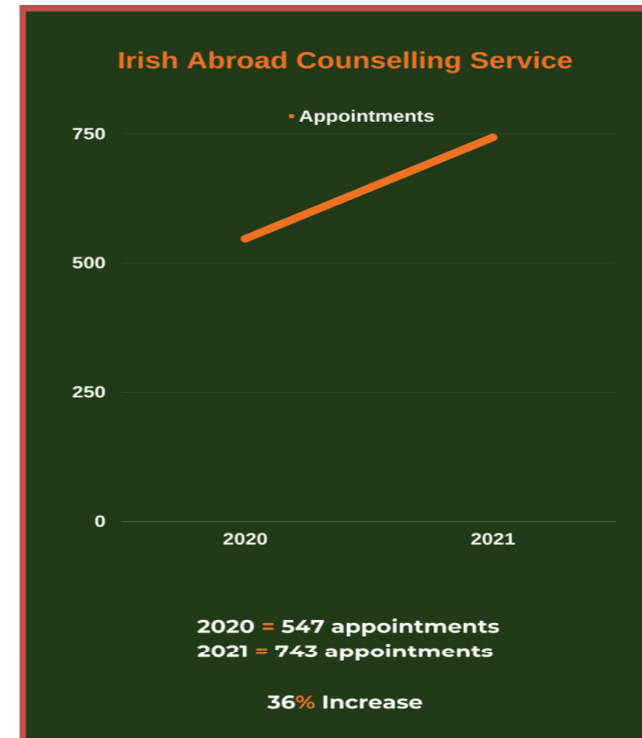
"Thank you for giving us the opportunity to take part in The Voyage. We liked that the sessions were short and the creative activities could be extended. I noticed that several of the children said they were taking a break to go to their 'happy place' so they certainly took the information on board. Their favourite part was the guided meditation in Chapter 6. I'm sure many of them will access the sessions in future."

The trailer for The Voyage (and our other Student Mental Health Workshops for 2nd & 3rd level - to be released November 2022) can be viewed here:

<https://tinyurl.com/227ahtkp>

Furthermore, we expanded and enhanced all the counselling services we provide to the public locally, nationally and internationally.

Please see below some of the appointment statistics with regard to our counselling services:



Partnerships

Partnership is one of our values and this value was also enhanced during the reporting period.

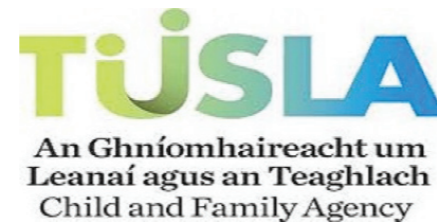
We continued our partnership with the Gambling Awareness Trust to provide Ireland's only national gambling addiction counselling service.



GAMBLING AWARENESS TRUST.ie



We continued our partnership with TUSLA to provide an alcohol dependency counselling service for their clients. In fact, we expanded our partnership with TUSLA during this period as we were asked to provide a second service – providing a suite of counselling services for their foster carers.



In January 2021 we were named Best SME for 2020 by Galway Chamber of Commerce Business Awards.



We developed a new partnership with Rethink Ireland as we were one of 16 organisations (one of the top two funding allocation wise) to be successful in gaining a spot on Rethink Ireland's coveted Social Enterprise Development Fund in 2021.

RETHINK IRELAND Our Social Innovation Fund

Helplink were participants of the first Genesis Programme in 2020. Following this, Helplink applied to the Social Enterprise Development Fund and were awarded a cash grant and further business supports in 2021. The funding has allowed them to develop their strategic plan. Their strategic objectives for the future include reaching 30% of the student population (primary, 2nd & 3rd level) in Ireland to deliver accessible and continuous mental health education by the end of 2024.

"From the first consultation session, I felt like they just got us. It was a huge support to know you had someone to guide you, to walk with you, to work with you hand in hand in developing the strategic plan which is so critical. It's vital to have that support to really look at your work and see the path forward."

Lochlann Scott, Founder and CEO of Helplink

Launch of National Fundraiser

For many years, we as an organisation have been searching for a national fundraiser that will aid in creating an even more sustainable organisation from a financial point of view; to help us deliver our services and also develop new services and locations.

In 2021 we began our first national fundraiser called **Coldtober™**.

Coldtober™ is a fundraising event for the month of October, each day we invited over 490 participants to join us in this month-long sea swimming fundraiser challenge. The fundraiser was a significant success not just financially (we secured over 129k in donations), it also helped to raise our national profile. This led to a greater impact as our services were being utilised even more by the public e.g. 45% increase in appointments for some of our counselling services.



With additional thanks to our main sponsor and new partner:



Financial Review

Summary surplus for the year

With regard to the income received in 2021, €155k was related to restricted programme income and the remaining €411k related to an increase in unrestricted income.

	2021	2020	Increase	% Increase
Income	€565,558	€305,268	€260,290	59.78%
Expenditure	€412,163	€270,079	€142,084	41.65%
Surplus	€153,395	€35,188		

Full results for the year are set out in the abridged audited accounts on this webpage: <https://helplink.ie/about-helplink/> - with a detailed breakdown of all our sources of funding, with comparative figures for 2020.

Reserves Policy

Following a recommendation of the Finance Sub-Committee, the Board has previously agreed that a prudent reserves policy is the maintenance of three to six months of self-funded operating costs. The Helplink Mental Health Board is next due to review the current level of reserves at the November 2022 Board meeting and allocate as much of the reserves as is financially prudent into a separate account in the organisation's main bank account.

Fundraising

Helplink Mental Health Ireland is funded by multiple revenue streams, from the general public for some of our counselling services which are low cost, from Service Level Agreements with third party entities/organisations, via funding applications from other bodies (including three government bodies – Galway and Mayo local councils and the Dept. of Rural and Community Development) and via donations; both corporate and public.

In 2021 we began our first ever national fundraising event called Coldtober™ where members of the public swim in safe cold water (sea/lakes/rivers) swimming spots and/or take 30second cold showers, while raising funds for our much needed services. Coldtober™ was a great success bringing in over 120k for the organisation to support us in providing our services.

This funding allowed us to hire new counsellors and therapists to support the significant increase in people seeking support from us and it also helped us to hire a service delivery manager in 2022.

Thank You to Our 2021 Supporters/Partners/Funders

(A selection of which are below)



An Roinn Forbartha
Tuaithe agus Pobail
Department of Rural and
Community Development



GAMBLING
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Comhairle Cathrach na Gaillimhe
Galway City Council



Comhairle Contae Mhaigh Eo
Mayo County Council



RETHINK
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Our
Social
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